

*Cosmopolitanism's Double Gesture:  
Diasporic Chinese Writers Lynn Pan and Hong Ying*

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Abstract

With the world becoming more than ever a global village, the call of globalization has facilitated transnational, transcultural, as well as transdisciplinary studies of what Goethe termed “world literature,” particularly in terms of the shared humanist concern and portrayals of an internally or externally migrant, transcultural, cosmopolitan self. What this paper would like to emphasize is the aspect of the cosmopolitan migratory self’s simultaneous yearning for a locality of what could be called home, whether it is imagined or romanticized, detested or cherished. By focusing on the diasporic Chinese writers, Lynn Pan and Hong Ying, and their literary works, and by providing a theoretic approach that enables the reading of a double-gestured movement of simultaneously going global and local, it intends to argue that the transnational, transcultural, migrant self is at once culturally localized, designating a multifacetedness of belonging at the juncture of globalization and cultural intersections.

**Keywords:** migration; transnation; cosmopolitanism; double-gestured; belonging

## I. Introduction:

With the world becoming more than ever a global village, the call of globalization has facilitated transnational, transcultural, as well as transdisciplinary studies of what Goethe termed “world literature” (Eckermann 137), particularly in terms of the shared humanist concern and portrayals of an internally or externally migrant, transcultural, cosmopolitan self. In this age of increasing global integration and migration of all forms, Marx and Engels' envisioning in *The Communist Manifesto* of the rise of a world literature “from the numerous national and local literatures” that makes “national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible”(9) seems to reflect the de facto reality of the postmodern epoch of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is true that it is now hardly possible to interpret literatures produced around the world purely from any perspectives of traditional literary criticism, or talk about what is traditionally labelled “national literature” without the penetrating glimpses of a cosmopolitan world.

It is precisely the awareness of a growing globalized cosmopolitan world that witnessed the rise in the past decades of various forms of literature, which depict the sensibilities of transnationalism and transculturality as reflected, for instance, in postcolonial literature, literatures of diaspora, exile and migration. Even ethnic literatures, such as Afro-American, Chinese-American literatures which used to be localized within the boundary of the U.S., started to take on board literatures composed in languages other than English by early or new immigrants that clearly transcend the national, cultural and linguistic boundaries and reject easy classification. Meanwhile, (re-)interpretations of literary texts from earlier stage of modern era all point to the sense of a rising globality and transnationalism. For instance, the reinterpretation of Du Bois' classic work *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) by Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* points to the Black transnational sensibility. Personally yet directly, the notion of “citizens of the world,” as well as the poetics of wandering, loss and desire for belonging, are clearly articulated in the much ignored Chinese-born American émigré writer Mai-mai Sze's autobiography, published in as early as the 1940s, *Echo of a Cry: A Story Which Began in China*, where she writes,

Eventually we might become citizens of continents instead of nations. It would be a step in transition to becoming in reality citizens of the world. [...] wherever we have been and whatever we have done[,] there runs through the memories a yearning, or a search for something. Fervently we have wanted to belong somewhere at the same time that we have often wanted to run away. [...] There is one part of us that is always lost and searching. It is an echo of a cry from the first moment of awareness, the cry that was a longing for warmth and safety. (Sze 196-97)

What brings these works and many other contemporary writings by postcolonial, immigrant, exilic or diasporic writers together, to name just a few, Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, J.M. Coetzee, Lynn Pan, Guo Xiaolu, is not only the transnational humanist concern that forms the basis of a world literature in general, but also the shared portrayal of a migrant, transcultural, cosmopolitan self. What is of equal importance, however, as I would like to place my emphasis on, is the aspect of the cosmopolitan migratory self's simultaneous yearning for, as phrased by Sze as an

“echo of a cry,” a place called *home*, whether it is imagined or romanticized, detested or cherished, when “home” in effect has become “a dozen other places across the seas” (Sze 13). Here goes a double-gesturedness of the movement of going global. As this paper intends to argue, the transnational, transcultural, migrant self is at once a culturally localized self, designating a multifacetedness of belonging at the juncture of globalization and cultural intersections. In what follows, this paper is divided into two big parts. The first part focuses on the (con)textual reading of two Chinese writers and their works in the Chinese diaspora, Lynn Pan and Hong Ying, evoking the reading of a double-gesturedness of the cosmopolitan self. The second part refocuses on cosmopolitanism’s double gesture from a theoretical perspective.

## II. Diaspora and Cultural Imaginings: Lynn Pan and Hong Ying

Although Lynn Pan and Hong Ying are both British by nationality and both residing now in China, they belong to different generations of diasporic Chinese writers, and their differences cannot be greater when considering their family, educational and overseas backgrounds. Born into an elite family in Shanghai in the 1940s, Lynn Pan grew up in Malaysia and left for England and studied at the universities of London and Cambridge. After having lived, studied and worked in England for over 20 years, and spent teaching spells in Geneva and Helsinki, she moved to Hong Kong in the late 1980s working as a journalist, before settling down in Singapore as the director of the Chinese Heritage Centre there. She returned to live in Shanghai in recent years.

Pan’s life journey cannot be more diasporic. With her family and family relations scattered around the world and herself constantly shuttling between Europe and Asia, her diasporic life did not give her a sense of identification which she felt only when she first came to Hong Kong: “For the first time ever, I felt a sense of identification. I became emotionally involved. I felt I had a stake in Hongkong. and I’ve never felt that about any place I’d been. Hongkong was like me. It was Chinese yet it had this western veneer. That’s what I liked” (Khanna). And this does sound like a self-definition of a sort. Through all the travels before this point, she had acquired this thin layer of “western veneer.” She is Chinese, yet Chinese with a difference. Her Chinese self seems to have come full circle when she, after lifelong travel, returned to the place where she was born, Shanghai.

In *Tracing It Home: Journeys Around a Chinese Family*, the only memoir that Pan writes, which literally articulates the diasporic, cosmopolitan self’s yearning, imagining and rediscovery of her Chinese, especially, her Shanghainese roots, she describes the “return” as the “familiar sensation of homecoming” (36). It is here, in this memoir written after almost a half century living away from her birth place, Pan concludes, “The present is only today’s version of the past; and there is no one for whom today is not contaminated by yesterday. The past is there; it belongs already to your experience. You carry in you a history you may know little of. Even when you leave home it travels with you. And it is too much. And yet unless I am part of it I am nothing” (234-35).

As the best witness of the diasporic self’s journey toward self-discovery, from being “Shanghainese first” to becoming a cosmopolitan, from discovering Malaysia and Singapore culture to reuniting with her Shanghainese roots, all Pan’s non-fiction books are remarkably related to China, such as *China’s Sorrow* (1985), *The New*

*Chinese Revolution* (1987), *Sons of the Yellow Emperor* (winner of the 1992 Martin Luther King Memorial Prize), *Tracing It Home* (1994), *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas* (1999), and most recently, *Shanghai Style* (2008). As if making the full circle even fuller, *Shanghai Style: Art and Design Between the Wars* captures the quintessential grand Shanghai style that Pan left behind when she migrated with her parents to Malaysia in the 1950s.

As opposed to Lynn Pan, Hong Ying was Chinese-born and educated. Growing up in a poor family in the slum area of Chongqing as the sixth child, Hong Ying's life had been one of struggle for survival, until her marriage to her first British-Chinese scholar husband in 1991. She moved back to live in Beijing in 2000 after the first marriage shattered. Re-married to her second British writer and businessman husband, she now divides her time between Beijing and London. Writing in Chinese language, Hong Ying shot to international fame with her first confessionist autobiography *Daughter of the River* published in 1997, which was translated to about twenty languages and appeared on the bestseller lists of numerous countries. A decade later, her second autobiography *Good Children of the Flowers* (2009) once again brought her back into the limelight with revelations of her polygamous lifestyle and the dark secrets of her life.

Confession, sexuality, and electra complex become the features of Hong Ying's autobiographical works. It is precisely through her confession of sexuality and electra complex that we catch a glimpse of the author's westward journey toward her cosmopolitan existence. If her second marriage to Adam Williams and the birth of her daughter Sybil literally symbolize her transculturality and cosmopolitanism, her first turbulent marriage to the London-based British Chinese scholar Zhao Yiheng, through her confession of her love for Zhao as the "father," of her exposure to western way of sexual freedom, and of their practice of polygamous marriage and open relationships, details the painful internal process of her loss of self en route to becoming eventually a "citizen of the world."

Like Lynn Pan, finding her way back to her Chinese cultural roots through literally re-imagining and re-mapping China with words, Hong Ying's diasporic existence of loss, desire and painful search are distilled into her literary creations, her rediscovery and reconciliation with her mother. As Hong Ying confesses, "Chongqing is the mother, London is the lover, and Beijing is the husband."<sup>1</sup> Her two autobiographies, dedicated to her mother, are works about the cosmopolitan self's identification with her cultural roots, Chongqing, the place she was born and grew up. The reunion and reconciliation with her mother, the embodiment of her past, is clearly indicated in her recently published autobiographical work *Good Children of the Flowers*, both in the prologue and the epilogue:

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<sup>1</sup> Hong Yin, 虹影: 北京是丈夫, 伦敦是情人 ("Hong Ying: Beijing is the Husband, London is the Lover"). By Liu Bin. *China. Com. Cn.*. 5 March 2013 <<http://www.china.com.cn/chinese/RS/352297.htm>>. In this interview, Hong articulates her different senses of attachment to different places and how she now lives her life: "Chongqing is for me my mother, that piece of land gave me birth and nurtured me; Beijing is my husband, I never have regretted having chosen him; London is my lover, a strange land with strange taste, which brought the twist to my life. In effect, my time now is hard to be clearly divided, it could be said that half of my time is spent in Beijing and half abroad. By 'abroad' I do not mean London alone" (My translation). ("重庆对我而言, 是我的母亲, 那片土地养育了我; 北京是我的丈夫, 我永不后悔当初选择了北京, 伦敦是我的情人, 异国情调, 是我生命的一个转折。其实我的时间现在已很难具体划分出, 可以说一半时间在北京一半时间在国外, 在国外也并非仅仅住在伦敦。")

现在想母亲的话时 ,我才发现自己也[.....]想追随父母的身影。我没有想到 ,也未敢想 ,有一天我会写一本关于母亲和自己的书 ,但我知道 ,只有写完这本书 ,才不再迷失自己[.....]. (写在前面)

Now when I think of Mother's words, I found myself [...] wanting to chase my parents ' shadow. I did not think, nor dared to think that one day I'll write a book about my mother and myself. But I know that, only by finishing writing this book can I refind my lost self [...]. (Prologue)

现在 ,这些事都是讲给母亲听的 ,我相信她的魂伴着我走这一程。[.....]七个月后 ,我在北京一家私立医院里生下一个女儿。[.....]她一触及到我 ,就止住哭 ,身体自动地靠过来 ,她的脸好像我母亲 ,她的外婆[.....]。是啊 ,她和母亲一样属相猪。眼泪顺着我的脸颊哗哗往下流。(228-29)

Now all these things are told to Mother. I believe that her soul will accompany me through this journey. [...] Seven months later, I gave birth to a daughter in a private hospital in Beijing. [...] She stopped crying the moment she touched me and her body automatically leaned towards me. Her face is just like my mother, her grandmother [...]. Yes, she is a pig in Chinese zodiac just like Mother. Tears splashed down my cheek. (228-29)

一个小蝌蚪在水里游 ,一个大蝌蚪跟在小蝌蚪身后。[.....]小蝌蚪对大蝌蚪说 ,真好 ,前一世你是我女儿 ,这一世你是我母亲 !我们俩永远在一起 ,永远不分离。(230)

A small tadpole is swimming in the water, a big tadpole is behind. [...] The small tadpole says to the big tadpole: It's really good that you were my daughter in the previous life, and in this life you're my mother! We two will be together forever, never part. (230)<sup>2</sup>

Both Lynn Pan and Hong Ying have, in their different ways, in fiction or non-fiction, re-created past histories of the places of their belongings, Shanghai and Chongqing, that are significant part of the self. Despite their diverse travel routes and their different ways of transculturation and cosmopolitan existence, they do not, as is the case with many other diasporic Chinese writers around the world, to name a few, British-Chinese writers Liu Hong and Xue Xinran, Australian-Chinese writer Ouyang Yu, Malaysian-Chinese writer Tash Aw, Chinese American writers Nieh Hualin, loosen the gaze back into what have been the roots of their cultural makeup. With this I move now to the next section of my paper, which refocuses on the double-gestured cosmopolitan existence from a theoretic perspective.

### III. Transnation, transculture: Cosmopolitanism's double gesture

If transnational and transcultural migration and diaspora are seen as the moving force that fractures the parameters of nation and identity, the oxymoronic relationship between the two is clearly challenged by the brief survey of the diasporic Chinese writers Lynn Pan and Hong Ying. Viewed within the bigger context of British-Chinese literature, the literary works written over a historical period of roughly 70 years, by early, later and contemporary British Chinese migrant writers,

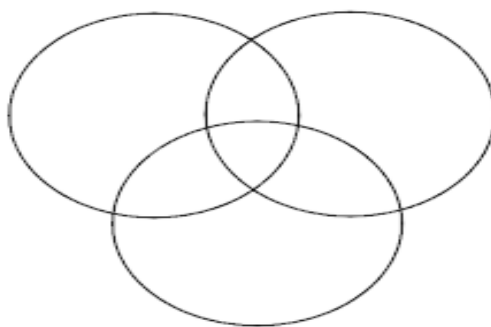
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<sup>2</sup> My translation.

either from mainland China or Malaysia, Hong Kong or Taiwan, and the BBC (British-born Chinese), one sees, despite their enormous contextual heterogeneities and creative diversities, the dynamic double act of global migration and diaspora. That is, the act of going global toward transnational and transcultural cosmopolitanism implicates a simultaneous act of going local toward a cultural locality of a re-imagined *homeplace* (Tang 26). As with, apart from Lynn Pan and Hong Ying, Hsiung Shih-I, Ling Suhua, Guo Xiaolu, their journeys out to the West, toward being the cosmopolitan citizen of the world, end with finding ways of reconnecting with the *homeland* or *homespace* through writing, re-writing about China, and telling and re-telling China stories, even though the *homeland*, as well as the self, keeps on acquiring new contents and meanings all the way along the itineraries of constant arrivals and departures.

In theorizing the postnational ethos in an age where concepts like “flexible citizenship” capturing the mobile “flexible accumulation” (Ong 157), or “romanticized globalism” articulating “a border-crossing postcolonial expansiveness [... spelling] freedom, equality, and justice on a new scale of human solidarity” (Wilson 358), cultural critics have warned against the “weightless” universalism or the “amnnesiac” postmodernism packed into the term cosmopolitanism. Drawing attention to the “uneven contradictions, regressive and progressive twists and turns” of “*cosmopolitan* as sign of geopolitical location” (353), Rob Wilson postulates “a material cosmopolitanism” that belongs to “new cultures of global/local mixture [... serving] better ends than the xenophobic hegemony of mononations, monoraces, and monocreds” (359-360). James Clifford, taking account of all “different forms of encounter, negotiation, and multiple affiliation”(365), puts forward the concept of “discrepant cosmopolitanisms” that “name and make more visible a complex range of intercultural experiences, sites of appropriation and exchange”(369). For Clifford, these “cosmopolitical contact zones,” by being “traversed by new social moments and global corporations, tribal activities and cultural tourists, migrant work remittances and email,” guarantee nothing but “contamination, messy politics and more translation”(369).

Correlating with such a new sense of cosmopolitanism, the historicized or contextualized cosmopolitan self as represented by the diasporic Chinese writers Lynn Pan and Hong Ying and their works, whilst contesting the oversimplifying antithesis between nation and transnation, cultural and transcultural identities, the global and the local, speaks of a double-, indeed, multi-gesturedness of cosmopolitanism. To illuminate my point, I would like to use the venn diagram to map out the contact zone of cultural negotiation and translation.



Contact Zone of Negotiation and Translation

The three circles may be viewed as designating different nations and cultures, whereas the intersection in the middle, technically termed *lunula*, which I take from Jacques Lacan yet depart from the specific psychoanalytic context of his usage in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, signifies a midland of fluid double belonging as well as ambiguous *in-* and *exclusion*.<sup>3</sup> The evocation is multiple-folded. First of all, by constantly crossing the borderlines of nation, culture, as well as gender, race and class, the migrant self is engaged in an on-going process of dialogue, contestation and modification, bespeaking what Stuart Hall calls a “process of cultural translation” that “is inevitable in a world where communities, peoples, cultures, tribes, ethnii are no longer homogeneous, self-sufficient autochthonous entities” (Hall, “Multicultural Question” 6). At the same time, amidst the myriad geographical and psychic, spatial and temporal crossings, where cultures meet and interact, not only hybridized forms of culture emerge through living with cultural differences, intercultural translation and transculturation, but all forms of cultural bonding that are grounded in “some continuity with the past” (Hall, “Cultural Identity” 395), either the nostalgically re-imagined or strategically reconstructed, co-exist alongside the dominant mainstream forms of culture or identity. Thirdly, if the transnational cosmopolitan zone speaks of the interaction between different cultures, namely, opposition and interdependence, difference and connection, the overlapping midland highlights a double belonging, an ambivalent fluidity and *in-* and *exclusion*, precisely articulating the hybridity, multiplicity, heterogeneity or “messiness” of James Clifford’s cosmopolitical space.

To conclude, viewed from such a zone of negotiation and translation, cosmopolitanism and the cosmopolitan self as represented by the Chinese diasporic writers Lynn Pan and Hong Ying and their works are clearly shown as designating a double, and indeed, a multi-gestureness of being both transnational, all-embracing, “enlightened and mobile” (Wilson 353), and national, historically rooted, locally embedded. As such, it speaks at once of rupture and continuity, hybridity and historical specificity.

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<sup>3</sup> In the final section of *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Jacques Lacan uses venn diagram to illustrate the “realization of the subject in his signifying dependence in the locus of the Other.” Here, making use of the intersecting circles, Lacan is able to demonstrate how the dialectical operation of *either/or*—what he refers to as “the *vel* of alienation,” whereby the choice of the one indicates the disappearance of the other—simultaneously implicates yet another operation, that of “joining.” Following the logical form of “joining,” the actual joining together of the elements belonging to the two circles, because of their double belonging, does not add up to a doubling of their numbers. By logic of this, “the *vel* of alienation,” in Lacan’s words, “is defined by a choice whose properties depend on this, that there is, in the joining, one element that, whatever the choice operating may be, has as its consequence a *neither one, nor the other*.” While the splitting and partiality indicate the inherent function of the signifying system of language itself that creates the alienation and fragmentation of the subject, what is of importance for my purposes here is to see the overlapping middle section—the *lunula* of non-meaning—as a non-place that paradoxically speaks of both inclusion and exclusion, both connection and separation. It is, to reformulate Lacan, an unstable non-place of a *neither one, nor the other, yet both*. It is precisely in view of the *lunula* as a non-place of fluid double belonging and *in-* and *exclusion*, yet departing from the specific psychoanalytic context, that Lacan’s venn diagram is adapted here to foreground, on the one hand, a “non-place” position of a multifaceted *neither one nor the other yet both* and, on the other hand, the dynamic paradoxical interrelation of separation and connection, contestation and interdependence between conflictual opposites, as especially applicable, in the context here, nation and transnation, culture and transculture, the global and the local, as well as the self and other. The adaptation of the Lacanian venn diagram does not simply display a universal mono-dimensional layout of the constitution of the cosmopolitical space, but rather, illuminates a dynamic full complexity of dual- or multi-dimensional interactions within a nexus of relations represented by the intersecting circles.

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